Pig Anemia

The piglet is born with limited supplies of iron and if it had been born in the wild would depend on supplementation to its diet from iron bearing soils. Indoors the pig has no access to iron other than to the sows' milk (which is deficient) until it starts to eat creep feed. It is necessary therefore to give extra iron either by mouth or by injection. The pig is born with a normal level of hemoglobin in the blood of 12-13g/100ml and this rapidly drops down to 6-7g by 10 to 14 days of age. A shortage of iron results in lowered levels of hemoglobin in the red cells, (anemia), a lowered capacity for the carriage of oxygen around the body and an increased susceptibility to disease.

Clinical signs

Piglets appear pale from 7 days onwards, sometimes but not always with a slight check in growth. The color of the skin may take on a slight yellow or jaundiced appearance. In severe cases breathing is rapid particularly with exercise and there may be a predisposition to scour.

Diagnosis

This is based on the clinical signs, the lack of any supplemental iron and the hemoglobin level in the blood. If this is less than 8g/100ml the piglet is becoming anemic.

Treatment

- Inject piglets with 200mg of iron dextran.

Management control and prevention

- The easiest method is to give the piglet an injection of 150- 200mg of iron dextran in either a 1 or 2ml dose.
- Iron is best given from 3 to 5 days of age and not at birth. A 2ml dose at birth causes considerable trauma to the muscles.
- The sites of injection are either into the muscles of the hind leg or into the neck. Use a 21 gauge (5/8 inch) needle.
- Iron can also be given orally but this method is time consuming and the pig must be treated on 2 or 3 occasions at 7, 10 and 15 days of age.
- Oral pastes available ad lib have been used but the uptake within any litter is variable and a few piglets remain anemic.

(thepigsite.com "Anemia - Iron Deficiency")